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HOSPITAL DAYS IN ROUEN

HOSPITAL DAYS

IN

ROUEN

TINA GRAY

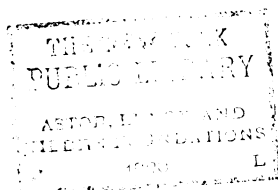
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ROUEN MEMORIES.

Now that the war is over and we are
Once more in England, it all sometimes seems
Like the strange happ'nings one lives through in dreams—
Convoys, and Bull-Ring, vibrant guns afar.

Still we remember how the sunlight cast
Blue shadows on the canvas of the tents.
Of apple blossom: how the sun-warmed scents
Swept the whole compound as the wind went past.

Still we remember the dead brackens' gold,
The spiders' webs, the columned forest aisles
Whose stillness carried sound for miles and miles;
The scent of frozen moss and leafy mould.

Still we remember those who walked those ways,
Gallant, and gay of soul, and very young.
Surely we need not number them among
All we have lost since those sad, happy days.

CHAPTER I.

THE SETTING OUT.

Now that I look back on them, the thirteen months of hospital life present a medley of curious impressions, in which the sad and the merry, the interesting and the ludicrous, are inextricably mingled. From the moment of leaving England the unusual became the commonplace. The look of that channel steamer's deck remains vividly photographed on my mind, a little world peopled with Tweedledums and Tweedledees, for the "Back" and "Front" lifebelts gave that unwieldy, war-girt look to all the passengers. On either side the destroyers raced ahead, now visible across yards of green heaving chalky water, now hidden by the upward swing of the bulwarks. A drift of icy particles swept the decks, that were soon almost cleared of passengers. The cabin was a ghastly and humiliating sight. It was a thousand times better to stay in the bleak, bitter cold of the waning

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January day, than to share a sour, stuffy cabin with prone human beings green and uncaring. Stiff with cold, at last we disembarked; the receipts for the registering of our luggage were collected, and we were herded to a curious French hotel almost on the Quay front.

Everywhere was white paint in various stages of cleanliness, from those radiant portions of the banisters that the painters were actually working at, with serene disregard both for the passers-by and their clothes; to these portions round the windows where it was chipped and flaky behind the eternal lace or net curtains. We could see through the glass doors of the lounge officers sitting in wicker chairs at little gilt tables. The whole place smelt unfresh, with a predominating odour of stale dinners and staler coffee. After some interminable formalities anent our ages and qualifications, we went in to dinner; a French dinner that began with sardines, and beetroot, and cold oily potatoes with onions and parsley. The noises from the docks seemed to be just outside the windows, and the bugle that signals the leaving trains seemed to go continuously. The hotel was crowded, so that six of us shared one large room. It had obviously once been a drawing-room, from the great mirrors on its walls and the mysterious black and gold cabinets, and the elaborate, un-

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friendly stove. But the alien-looking beds were quite comfortable, and a funny old chambermaid in a white muslin frilled mitch and black crocheted shawl, amiably filled our rubber bags for us; one more daring spirit than the rest having run her to earth through the swing-doors of the kitchen premises. It was our first night on active service, yet one of the V.A.D.'s settled for sleep in absolutely new pink silk pyjamas and an adorable white net boudoir-cap with forget-me-nots and pink bows. It was difficult to know which was the more ludicrous, the calling of it "Active Service" or the wearing of the boudoir-cap. It was all one with the jumbled phantasmagoria of that first night. In any case she proved a good Samaritan, for she gave me the reversion of her hot bag, as mine was snugly reposing in my trunk in some inaccessible spot at the docks.

We did not leave that bright, frost-bound town, with its biting winds, till midday. The railway line ran near the coast through bleak landscapes, with withered hedges, full of bramble and hackle, with blue patches of snow lying in the shadowed parts or where the driving wind had piled it. Occasionally one had a flying vision of a French cavalryman in a blue cloak sitting motionless among trees. Late in the afternoon we crawled through bleak, bitter

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sand-dunes, partly covered with dreary bents, past a great camp; thousands, it seemed, of little bell-tents clinging desperately to the unkindly sand. Beyond the camp again, I had the first sight of a soldiers' cemetery. Oh, those never-ending rows of pitiful little crosses, like a shadow or a network over the ground!

It was quite dark when we started the second half of our journey, changing trains in a half-lit, draughty station, with the snow lying thick on the rails. The R.T.O. held up the train for five minutes to let us have some coffee, but few obtained it, the thrifty Frenchwoman in the refreshment room being too busy gathering in the half-francs.

It was a curious journey, and several impressions stand out clearly. We had been talking, then someone suggested playing cards. An officer in the carriage broke in, saying he never wished to see cards again. A fortnight before he and three friends had been playing, when the Germans began shelling. They laid down their hands, and went off to reply. An hour later, when he came back, the cards were there just as they had put them down; but the other three would never come again.

The snowy embankment fell behind, illuminated by the dim lights from the carriages. Often we would slow down and creep into some

THE SETTING OUT.

siding, and other trains would rush past, lighted hospital-trains with a glimmer of beds, followed by great interminable lumbering trains, with mammoth things half-swathed in tarpaulins, rising out of the huge trucks. They would pass and we would start again with a jolting and groaning of coupling irons. All efforts at alertness vanished; the whole carriage frankly slept but myself. The light had mercifully dwindled to a mere blue pin-prick, hiding the hats awry, the dishevelled hair, the tired, white faces and the sagging jaws. It must have been nearly five o'clock in the morning when we slowed once more. Curiously home-like came the first faint throaty crowing of a cock. It was still quite dark outside. Half an hour later we were sliding hospitalwards in ambulances, our headlights whitening the frost-bound roads, and the interminable dust-covered trees.

CHAPTER II.

FROST, CHILBLAINS, AND BATHS.

THE first weeks were awful. When we went on duty at half past seven, everything seemed muffled in a deadening wall of frost; the fir forest beyond the hospital boundary showed dulled and blurred with hoar-frost. Eastward a row of stark, black trees silhouetted against the faint lightening of the sunrise. Every morning the crows were sitting there like stones, motionless among the branches, then as the first rays of the sun, red and fog-hazed, rose above the rim of the world, they suddenly spread their wings and flew upwards, cawing and circling above the trees, then flew slowly westwards.

By day the lockers in the tents froze as I scrubbed them, the ice needles running out behind my hand, the soap suds freezing as they stood. The lotions froze and cracked their bottles, and remained standing by themselves, bottle-shaped and cold. The lemons froze and

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we had to boil them before we could use them; the eggs froze; the bread and the milk froze. By night I froze myself. Sometimes, too cold to sleep, I lay listening on a still night to the crackling of the ice in the fire-buckets, or the scurry of rats under the floor-boards of the marquee. Or when it was windy I listened to the sliding "Hoo-oo" of the snow moving downwards to the slow lift of the canvas. Sometimes I crawled under a miscellaneous pile of all the clothes I possessed, in the vain hope of getting warm, to realize later that the sheer weight seemed to be giving me rheumatism and the pressure kept me cold. And the next night I would reverse the process, but still lie cold, wishing I had the courage to get up and get my coats again. So that the bat-man calling us in the morning, though sometimes it seemed like the middle of the night, was almost welcome.

The low wooden hut, where were our mess-room and sitting-room, was often in those days very picturesque, fringed round and round with foot-long icicles, like a Christmas card of a Canadian shack, but within it was cheerless in the mornings. The stove in the mess-room had a pretty habit of going out, and an even prettier habit of smoking viciously, when the bat-man, greatly daring, relit it with a plentiful supply of paraffin, with the result that the windows

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had to be opened. When the temperature without was below zero, the milk already frozen and the porridge plates and spoons a nightmare to touch, we failed to appreciate the beauty of these icicles.

Many of us at that time were working all day in woollen gloves, and about three jerseys under the long white gowns we wore over everything in the wards. Unless we were working with water these gloves remained on, making beds or putting out medicines, it did not matter. Some even came to meals in them, and as they were prone to chilblains I did not blame them. Some of the sisters suffered terribly with their hands, their fingers becoming swollen and stiff and discoloured, yet they felt lucky if when broken they did not become septic. It was a very minor hardship, but it was there even for those at this "cushy" Base-hospital.

Another little matter which one quickly fell into the way of might almost fall under the heading of hardship. Any hot water which one needed for washing—that allowance during the frost was a very small one sometimes; for several days we were reduced to a pint at night for all purposes—we had to fetch from the soyer beside our kitchen and carry it to our quarters. Sometimes when one came off duty at eight o'clock, fairly tired with trotting in and out

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of marquees, with a dropping temperature and thin driving snow, it was a thought after having dinner, and getting back to one's room with the stove on, to turn out again for that half-pint of water. A plan eventually adopted by nearly all of us, was to go straight to our rooms on coming off duty, and bring our pitchers to the mess-room door when we went in for dinner. It was rather a comic sight to see them standing in the snow, green jugs, blue jugs, big pitchers, little pitchers, all waiting for their owners.

Then baths! In winter they were a problem, sometimes an almost non-existent one when the frost held and the pipes froze, so that the baths in the bath-house were useless; and a half-inch or so of water in a camp bath in a draughty marquee or cubicle is a plan too Spartan to be indulged in often. In moderate weather, when our bath-house was going, there was more criticism and bad-feeling about them than about anything else. There were baths three days a week. A slate hung in the mess-room on which one jotted down one's name and the hour at which one intended to take a bath. But even so one was at the mercy of the unscrupulous. It happened often that one's predecessor drew off all the water, and was too careless to refill the soyer till she had finished, with the result that the chosen hour was past before the water was

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warm again. The soyer was outside, with a fire underneath, and it was necessary to go outside to turn on the cold water to fill it up. But with a little care and regulating of the running-in as the hot ran out there was not much trouble—too much, however, for some. There was general satisfaction when one hardened offender was reported by the bat-man who looked after the fire. She had emptied it completely, so that the boiler had nearly cracked in consequence, which would have been a really serious affair, for the quarter-master would have had to hear about it then.

Till our forest huts were put up the bath soyer was in full view of the M.O.'s quarters, and it sometimes amused us when we realized what an intimate knowledge they must have unconsciously obtained of our rain-coats and dressing-gowns as we regulated the supply. However, later on we had our revenge when they started a washing-day well in view of our forest huts. It seems they lost so much sending it to the French laundry that they started to do it themselves. It was an inspiring sight in the brilliant spring sunlight, under the bare apple-trees with their switches of green mistletoe, to see them working hard over tubs and pails of water, and later to watch the results of their labour waving and filling in the breeze.

CHAPTER III.

ORDERLIES AND OTHERS.

ORDERLIES were a problem to me at first. It was difficult just to grasp where their duties ended and mine began. All I knew, was that often theirs ended very soon and mine went on a long time. Custom brought wisdom, and gradually I learned to identify the different types. There was the pre-war R.A.M.C. sergeant, getting very rare as an orderly, for it is a hospital fetich that a sergeant must not work. He was excellent at getting everybody else to work, he regarded all the sisters with a tolerant scorn; and was rendered happy for a whole day if he could bring back the Diet Sheet and tell one there was an error in it. He unbent then a little and was almost kind. There was another orderly who had an engaging habit of talking of the "Quarter Bloke," a delightful irreverence when one thought of the mountainous dignity of that honorary lieutenant. He would also take the officer patients their shaving-

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water with one hand in his pocket. He rarely saw wrinkles in the brown blankets, but then he was blind of one eye. He was absolutely without frills, but he worked very hard, and did anything asked without demur. Of an entirely different type was another little orderly, the best bed-maker I ever saw. His off-duty time was sacred to cricket, and he confided in me one day with the hush of pure hero-worship in his voice that "that new medical officer is a Triple Blue, a Triple Blue, mind you. We'll beat the Con. Camp yet."

Then there was another, a little bit of a thing, not much more than five foot two, ugly, insignificant, but efficient. He wore huge spectacles that always seemed to catch the light. I could always tell when he came back on duty by the greetings from the patients, never once omitted, and a grand testimony to his popularity. "Bravo, Jim!! You're one of the best!!" Nothing was too much trouble for him, he was always ready to meet their kindly chaff with imperturbable good-humour. It was an inspiring sight to see him, in his shirt sleeves, working away at the floor with a dry scrubber, covered plentifully with an outworn pyjama jacket and a large piece of blanket to form a polisher; it suggested irresistibly a monkey on a stick, and it seemed a question which was

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moving the other, the little orderly or the "scrubber, dry, long-handled, for use of soldier, one" as they used to call it.

There were variants however from those amiable boys. One I remember, an older man, unprepossessing, thin, dark as an Italian, with a long broken nose, mocking little black eyes, and a buck-tooth that snarled at one from otherwise toothless gums. He was the kitchen orderly when I worked with him, by virtue of which designation he took complete possession of the Primus, and only at rare intervals would let me use it. He looked on at all attempts to make the jellies a little more appetizing or the bread and butter a little thinner for the sicker patients with a sneering smile of scorn. He always called the matron the "mattress"; and would return on duty on Sunday at five o'clock excited, argumentative and decidedly beery. He had nineteen years' service in the army behind him, now P. B. (permanent base), he was drafted into the R.A.M.C. His best point was his kindness to the younger patients of nineteen and twenty. I subsequently discovered that his only son, a boy about that age, was fighting in Salonica.

Among our bat-men we had some characters. They were all P. B. men. There was our cook for instance, a stout man with the build of a

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prize-fighter, and the protuberant brown eyes that go with a hasty temper. He was an autocrat, and our meals went in according to his time, or else, to use the expression of his fellow-workers, "He went off at the deep end." He had, however, a sneaking partiality for the sisters. He was known to say when reprimanded by the quarter-master for not wakening them at an air-raid alarm "Waken the sisters!! They are the only people who do any work in this hospital, do you think I was going to disturb them?" and when told he would be reported to the C.O. said, "And I would say the same to him too," and so he would. He had evidently a fair command of French, for every half-day, he had dinner with a French family, with the people of his "Fiancy" he used to say, and through them he used to obtain some wonderful bargains for the sisters, from ice and fish, to gardening tools. He fell sick, however, and after luxuriating as a patient in his own hospital, he went to Blighty.

Then there was Sponge, the incomparable Sponge, "pronounced same as you wipe your face" he used to explain. He was one of those invincibly stupid people, who start humble—*vide* his down-hearted "What a silly chump I am!" for his innumerable mistakes when he came to us—but having once grasped a routine

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gradually rise to assertive and obstinate swelled-headedness. He had a most annoying habit of standing at the pantry-door of our mess-room when a meal was in progress, almost audibly counting how many places he would have to lay for the second service. At those times it was useless to try to catch his eye, you might be in the most desperate hurry, you might be starving, you had to wait till the solemn ritual was over. He had favourites too, which was very trying for the sisters in the mess, when harassed by carving for say over thirty people from ration beef that was getting pretty near the bone, to be urgently enjoined in an impressive whisper, "A little bit of the brown for Sister Jones" or "Meat, potatoes but no gravy for Sister Robinson." Doubtless he was doing his best.

CHAPTER IV.

JELLY CRYSTALS WITH DIGRESSIONS.

IMAGINE to yourself a small wooden kitchen attached to a long polished ward. The window looks out across a little stretch of grass to the main road. By way of a digression I may say it is an interesting road too. Often of a morning between the slim silver-grey stems of the beech-trees the Indian cavalry go by, the sun lighting to pale gold their long belted khaki blouses, their still bronze faces, their lance-points; and their khaki turbans with the long dangling fringed ends, which, by the way, they use prosaically for handkerchiefs. At other times it would be the little old, bumping, trundling, military tramway, with the old, old French driver and conductor, muffled to the ears in enormous blue coats, with their little aged red eyes peering about over their upturned collars. At some hours of the day the car would be hung with khaki, excitable little Welsh infantry men; hastily soaped and brushed R.A.M.C. boys just

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off duty ; cheery dull-skinned American orderlies in their tight jackets and canvas leggings ; all amiably making room for the sisters waiting at the next stopping-place. Yes, quite an interesting road if one had time to stand gazing.

When in the kitchen I generally found plenty to employ me, especially in those good old days before we had to cut down our "extras." A "Diet Sheet" is a poor miserable thing now. Then, given a ward with patients convalescing nicely but still on "No Diet," there were many little ways of varying their food, and they were so pleased when that was done. When you have made a serious effort to produce a bread pudding, made from the scraps, and odds and ends of bread, flavoured it with the rind of a lemon, and having replaced the "gift" eggs, at tea-time, with new laid ones from madame's little booth beside the forest-path, you have the gift eggs to add to the pudding, the whole concoction at last poured over a nice thick layer of jam, it is pleasant to be greeted by a chorus of cheery remarks such as:—"This is a real Blighty pudding"; "Just like one my mother used to make"; "Sister, you're one of the best."

There was another pudding we often made in autumn, when the apples were ripe. The hospital was set right in the middle of an orchard. Alas! A cider-apple orchard. However one

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or two of the trees were eating-apple ones, so we used to collect the fallen ones and stew them, and then we put them in the rather insipid jellies to flavour them. These packets of jelly crystals had very varied careers but they were always useful. A little Scotch orderly we had, taking pity on the poor English who knew no better, used to sweeten their porridge in the morning if the sugar was short, with a packet of raspberry crystals. It made it a little pink perhaps, but sweetened it all right, which was the main point. We have often used a vanilla packet to sweeten their ten o'clock cocoa. But the days of ten o'clock cocoa are almost past now. Then for special occasions we used to buy a tin of peaches or apricots at the canteen and make the jellies with them. It gave quite a party-like effect when eaten with boiled and whipped "Ideal" milk.

It was "Jock" who ran me in for making scones for the boys one day. He said he could get some flour, if I could wangle the tartaric acid from the dispensary, which I did. The only stove belonging to the ward was a Primus, and as the heat was far too fierce for baking, I brought over from my room a "Flamme Bleue," a French stove for which I have the greatest admiration; it will really keep "deux casseroles" going at once, as the salesman assured

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me when I bought it. I borrowed a frying-pan from the officer-patients' kitchen, and turned it into an oven by means of a lid. The scones proved a great success, but I never found out to this day from where or how Jock obtained the flour. I daresay some things are best not enquired into.

The other V.A.D. and I used to have a good deal of amusement out of our little cooking exploits. We even went the length of getting arrowroot to make white sauce for their fish, which looked so unappetizing when served so hideously and obviously boiled. It was long before we could add the final touch of parsley to it, for neither of us knew the French for parsley, so we could not ask for it. We had to wait till we saw it and could point to it.

Another instance of the little extra things one can do for the patients came under my notice. One of the V.A.D.'s on night-duty was specialising a patient. He was rather an uninteresting, cantankerous boy, but about as ill as he could be. The V.A.D. discovered that to add to his physical illness he was mentally worried. There was a little W.A.A.C. near his camp and he had not heard from her! He did not admit, but hinted that he had not been very kind to her, and he was afraid now that he would never hear from her again. So the V.A.D. bought

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some of the nicest fruit she could see in town, and asked the Day People to give it to him, and say that it had been left for him at the office. When she went on duty that night he was much brighter. He showed her the fruit and told her he thought it must be from his W.A.A.C. Far too ill to eat the fruit he liked to touch and look at it, and he was obviously easier in his mind. It was a harmless, kindly little deception, and it tided him over a difficult place. He got better, and we heard later that communication had been re-established. We only hoped he did not enquire too deeply into that gift of fruit.

CHAPTER V.

NIGHT-DUTY IN SUMMER.

I WISH to give an idea of night-duty when the hospital was still under canvas, of night-duty when my compound was slack, a delightful condition of things that rarely lasts. I wish to go over again those long quiet nights of my first week—to reconstruct it.

Evening has come. The hospital is quiet. The fir-trees in the outskirts of the forest are silhouetted black against the transparent green of the Western sky. Eastward the stars are blazing into being. The tents, rain-darkened, weather-stained, still shimmer faintly through the night, like great gray moths. The light from the one tall electric standard picks out the myriad pale tent-ropes and etches them in shadow on the whiter canvas of the sides of the tents. When I listen, from all around comes the faint even breathing of the patients. All is curiously quiet in the camp, curiously still after the bustle of the day. No

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one is stirring. A great night-moth is purring over the dim sweet tangle of the garden, where the night-scented flowers exhale their faint cool perfume. Ghostly trumpet-blooms of nicotine, strange feathery thickets of fennel, white blossoms like arrested butterflies in the sweet-pea hedges under the electric light seem unreal, the leaves startlingly green and sharply shadowed, like something in a theatre.

Twelve o'clock. Now all the sky is a dark star-sown blue, the faint smoky track of the Milky Way runs east and west. A shooting star blazes headlong to eternity near the pointer of the Plough. In the next compound like a will-o'-the-wisp a dim white figure with a hurricane lantern is moving round the lines. A little wind arises and eddies and drifts the garden scents, then dies away. The slow roar of the sea comes momentarily from the fir-tops as they sway and then grow still again. The night is never really silent here. There is the quiet of the sleeping camp, accentuated by the drowsy stirring of some night-bird disturbed in the forest. But beyond that the whole atmosphere vibrates to the sad, terrible music of the guns, a recurring dull soft double sound, shaking the air as the bass of an organ shakes the air in a cathedral. Dogs bark far away in the city; from the forest comes a deep distant bay, the keeper's dog at the

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Maison de Forêt probably. Trains whistle and shunt and whistle. Goods trains, ambulance trains, all night long their whistles go. Occasionally the long-drawn syren comes of a ship going down the river.

Three o'clock. The world is still dark, dark and very cold. The garden glistens now with heavy moisture under the light. There is a clammy feeling in the air. It is an hour when one's vitality is very low, an hour of depression, an hour when patients on the D.I. list slip through the detaining fingers. The outlook is very black at three o'clock, a haunting hour, holding no promise of the coming dawn. A rat, sniffing cautiously, comes round the corner of a staff tent, and crosses the space of lighted ground, running double, rat and shadow.

Four o'clock. The low purring drone of ambulances fills the quiet night. A convoy is coming in to another compound. One after another the dark cars follow each other up the hospital road with ordered slowness, their blinding headlights whitening the ground before them. One by one they wind and go out as they turn along another road. Then later, through the space between the dividing tents, I catch a brief glimpse of stretcher after stretcher being carried in, the hurricane lantern held by someone invisible lighting up the stretcher-bearers

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and the prone figure under the brown blankets. Then all is peace again when the ambulances drone into the distance. Already the dawn is coming up. Eastward the sky shows greenly luminous behind the trees. The night is traveling westward; the sky is black and starry in that air. The firs as yet are only inkier shadows against the night. Minutes pass. The dawn is approaching fast. By five o'clock a few wisps of vapour have taken the light. A cock crows somewhere far away, an eerie pin-prick, to be answered and reanswered, near and familiar, and far away and faint from every quarter of the compass. The tents are now no longer just black silhouettes against the sky, but spread shadowy and gray. The vapour wisps are turning pink and rosy. Birds fly slowly into the dawn.

Six o'clock. The sun suddenly rises above the horizon. The rose-red clouds change through lavender and gray, to loose bright vaporious gold. The face of the world changes. The flowers, the paths, the tents grow full of colour. Colourful shadows grow behind each leaf, each stone, each rope. The gray muted stems of the fir-trees suddenly run fire and blaze in gilded orange, forming a slender pattern of coloured light against the clear dawn-blue. Rank on rank, of slim bright stems glittering like gold

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with a sort of unearthly radiance that holds me spellbound with its beauty and evanescence. Then as suddenly as it comes it vanishes in the light of common day. All the mystery and the glamour depart. In place of shimmering tremulous moths, working bees begin the business of the day in sober brown. Orderlies are hurrying about with enamel basins and cans. The dim blue-white figures of the night moving round with lanterns materialize into sisters in white gowns. They go round the compounds, thermometers in one hand, in the other, the long narrow, clay-coloured notebook, the "Hospital Diary, Prescription Book or Ward Book, and Daily Record of Extras and Medical Comforts issued to Patients in Field Ambulances," to give it its official title. The brown smoke rises and spreads from the newly-stoked boiler-fires. The low roar of Primus stoves comes from the kitchens. The workaday world has claimed the hospital again.

CHAPTER VI.

NIGHT-DUTY'S LITTLE WORRIES.

THE unspoken feud between the day and the night-staff is one curious phase of hospital life. Each conveniently and automatically becomes the safety-valve when anything is wrong. Unless one is careful, the habit of speaking with pained criticism of "those night-people" grows upon one, only to be broken when the necessity arises of mentioning "that day-staff of ours" with supercilious scorn. In most cases the vendetta arises out of the patients' food-stores. At least that was the case in my night-duty. At first "they"—it is more convenient to speak of "they" though the feud seldom extends to the day V.A.D. and orderlies—used to leave me enough to give the boys cocoa all round just before "Lights out"; but very quickly that ceased and one or two only could have it. However, when it reached the state of not leaving me enough stuff to give the regulation morning-tea to my sick officers, something had to be done.

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In the first place I cast a critical eye upon the diet-sheet to see if the shortage was genuine or suggestive of hoarding. It seemed the latter, I thought, so in a quiet interval of the night I commenced a thorough search and finally ran the "cache" to earth behind an unpromising and bulging array of stock pyjamas in the linen-cupboard. I have a theory about hoarded goods. If the day-staff deliberately hide the stuff and say they are short, then it is up to them to hide it properly. If not so hidden, it becomes justifiable treasure trove for me. So I took what was necessary and said nothing. "They" said nothing, and so the game went on placidly for a little. But a continuance was too good to hope for. There came one night when the store was moved a third time and no searching could reveal its whereabouts. I was driven to explaining to the boys, that though the day and night-staff were different the patients were the same, and if all the cocoa was drunk during the day well, they could not have it at night. So the matter had to end there.

One incident of night-duty recurs very vividly, though it did not happen to me. It was the experience of the V.A.D. working in the marquees at night in which I was working by day. One of our patients, an elderly man, really physically convalescent, was gradually

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becoming "mental." During the day he had assured us that he could not live over the night, that he had got his call, that he must have the priest. So strong was his delusion, so insistent was he, that the priest was sent for, and an extra orderly was put on that night to "Special" him, never to leave him alone. It seemed that when the V.A.D. went to supper, the orderly, seeing that all was quiet and his patient sleeping, thought this a good opportunity of having a cup of cocoa in the kitchen, a little wooden building twenty yards away. He was an old man and deaf; besides the heat of several days had culminated in a violent thunderstorm. When the V.A.D. returned she went along at once to see the patient. To her horror the bed was empty, no patient, no orderly about! She rushed to the kitchen to find the orderly obviously refreshing himself. He swore he had heard no step, nothing. But the roar of the thunder, the drumming of the rain on the roof, easily explained that. They rushed round the marquees to see if he had sought company there in the storm, but no! They gave the alarm. The police and the guard were called out. Search-parties beat the hospital grounds and the nearer forest, without result. The V.A.D., absolutely desperate, searched in the pouring rain among the wet, sagging rows of

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peas that flanked the compound. She spent hours walking round the little pond near by with a hurricane lantern searching for any tragic trace of him. I can picture that distraught figure, the wavering line of light across the black water, pitted and hissing with the rain. I can see the ducks illuminated by the sudden quivering glare of lightning, all peacefully asleep under the trees, I can see them roused by the approaching step, waddling and flying towards the water, adding their frightened quacking to the general confusion. About five o'clock in the gray light of a wet July morning our friend strolled home, soaked to the skin, with a new gray army-shirt over one arm, and two new pairs of socks in the other hand. He was quite undisturbed, said he had gone to the cavalry camp near by, to get back these things from a man who had borrowed them. Nobody could trace the things, a vague wave of his hand was all he gave by way of direction, so where he really spent the night remains a mystery. A hot bath, dry clothes and a warm drink of milk, and he went peacefully to sleep in the staff-tent as though nothing unusual had occurred. But that vigil by the pond remained a nightmare to the V.A.D. for weeks.

I remember another night of ludicrous confusion. Everything was going splendidly. It

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was my night to cook the night-staff's supper, and though there was a small convoy of twelve coming in to my compound it was not expected till six in the morning, so the night-super said I might as well carry on. Everything was quiet, they were all peacefully asleep when I went to make arrangements at half past eleven. The table in the night-hut was set and I was in the kitchen attached to our quarters putting the finishing touches to the tomatoes frying on my "flamme bleue" and hearing, subconsciously, loud rapid explosions in quick succession, but we heard so many from the night-manceuvres on the Bull Ring I did not think anything of it, till a loud angry voice called out, "Put out that light." I realized then it was an air-raid warning and the anti-aircraft guns on the heights were going strong. On going back to the night-hut I found most of the first-supper people collected there, very loth to return hungry to their compounds; but it had to be. All lights were out now. The guns were still going intermittently. Through the warm velvety darkness of the night I could hear the hush and whisper of many voices, from the infantry base across the way, and from the detachment paraded before the office, the shuffle of many feet as the men stirred. As my eyes got accustomed to the darkness I could see one or two stretcher-parties move off

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to be in readiness at various compounds, and nearly tripped over the handles of another stretcher that almost obstructed the road to mine. I stole round the marquees and was reassured by the sound of even breathing all around. They were undisturbed, anyway. Then began a monotonous watch. The guns ceased. A few warm drops of rain fell, the sibilant whisper of voices drifted from the compounds, someone laughed, then stopped abruptly as though startled at the loudness of it. Nothing happened. I was getting worried, for, if the train was not held up too, I had no beds ready for the convoy coming in. "That day-staff" had a pretty habit of leaving these little details such as the opening of new marquees to me, and the circumstances of the night were showing up the folly of it. Presently the signal went that all was clear. The bugles in the base depot sang out to dismiss. Voices were raised, We could hear the tramp, tramp of innumerable feet as they went back to camp. The lights were switched on again. The night-super came round to say that I better come and have my supper now and then get back and prepare for the convoy. She would come later and give me a hand with the beds. We had just finished the last when the convoy expected at six turned up

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at four. I just managed to finish things on time that morning, drying the last gargle-mug as the day-staff came on. One thing of interest emerged from the confusion. One patient who complained much of insomnia had never heard the guns or syrens. We were not surprised. He was.

CHAPTER VII.

WITH THE SICK SISTERS.

THERE was one allocation, to use the professional phrase, less coveted than any other in the hospital, and that was to be on duty with the "Sick Sisters." It was undesirable from many points of view. Figure to yourself the predicament of a poor V.A.D. ministering to a trained woman, and possibly a "Striped" sister and a "Regular" at that. The very thought of it is enough to make anyone nervous, and cause one to do things less professionally than usual. However, when I worked there we were so busy that I became quite case-hardened and ended by "Telling-off" one of them for continuing to put her orange-skins in her washing-water after I had several times civilly asked her not to, as I had subsequently to remove it or all our traps would have become choked. I don't think she ever forgave me, and I used to live in dread lest she should be taken on the permanent staff of the hospital, when she could have had her own back.

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That March was a perfect nightmare to me, though occasionally there were streaks of fun. For one thing it was hideously cold, not the light, bright, frosty cold of February, but sleet and snow and bitter winds. We seemed to spend our time plunging through icy foot-deep mud in gum-boots. We had twenty-six patients in, with kitchen accommodation for about fourteen. The marquee, that we, as overflow staff, had lived in in January and February, was now a ward, three extra bell-tents were pitched among the apple-trees beside the eight little wooden huts. These trays for breakfast, that regiment of little tea-pots, those battalions of cruets, tiny cream-jugs and sugar and jam-dishes, I shudder when I think of them yet! Those mornings when the sick-officers' cook signalled to us from his shanty that breakfast was ready, that plump, purposeful little V.A.D. staggering down to us with an enormous tray with hot plates and ham and eggs, those sybarites who desired coffee instead of tea, they all come back to me, and the feel of frozen fingers and leaden feet. I was the third V.A.D. in the Compound, and new and raw in the hospital. The task allotted to me was the washing of the dishes. The only orderly had the linen and the fires to see to, no small task, as they were not easy to light with coke and slack, moreover the lighting often included the disconnect-

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ing of the iron piping and the sweeping of them. So after breakfast I helped to collect the dishes. If I had had time I fain would have collected them all, for there are people who do not care how they mix them, cups and jam-dishes, porridge-plates stuck fast to ham-plates by frozen grease, not to speak of the long pieces of fat that would float into view when unsuspectingly I submerged them in the hot water, or the toast-crusts that would choke the waste pipe in this land beyond the ken of the Food Controller. In those days it seemed to me that I lived in an atmosphere of steamy dish-water all forenoon, for the breakfast-dishes would just be washed and the shelves washed and tidied when the eleven o'clock cocoa-cups would come in. The work was very necessary, no doubt, but sometimes I began to ponder what answer I would have to make if anybody ever asked me "What did you do in the Great War?"

The V.A.D.'s in the marquee were a cheery, unruly crew. It was a thought to go in and do the tidying there, for one had to run the gauntlet of ten pairs of idle eyes, and a barrage of witticisms, not to speak of criticism. The only thing to do was to remember that they were ill, keep your head and temper and watch for an opportunity to get your own back. I shall never forget the embarrassment of the second orderly,

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when at last we obtained one, when he had to go in and put coals on the fire the first time. In any case he had round surprised eyes, but that day they were rounder, more surprised, and his face was very pink when he came out. It was one of our own V.A.D.'s who was in sick at that time, who had sent for him on a fool's errand to tease him, for she had heard he had said he would never go into the marquee. He never forgave her, though in time he went in and out about the fires without turning a hair.

There was one sister in at that time, by common consent we called her "Languishing Lydia," unaware that that had been her nickname elsewhere. She never ran a temperature, and as a matter of fact was never very ill, yet would ask in a weak and weary voice to have her bed shifted, as when anyone passed it, it jarred her. All this the while she steadily munched hot buttered toast. Though due to be up she remained elegantly reposing on her bed, with baskets of decorated fruit, sent by admiring friends, beside her. Her refusal to get up finally roused our sister. The decree went forth that if she felt as ill as that, it would be safer for her to go back on "Fluids only." "Languishing Lydia" was up and dressed absolutely to time the following day, and to give her her due she bore no malice. She recognised that our sister

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had seen through her, and with a rather fascinating impishness gave way before the counter-attack.

Among other little worries in that awful compound was a strayed and shivering puppy that arrived, starving, with the ingratiating manners of the true mongrel, coupled with a delightfully irresponsible joyousness when he forgot to be cowed. He became the pet and plaything of the Sick Sisters. Then one day the M.O. espied him and forbade him the Compound. And from then he became a little worry to us. He would depart, then from some hiding-place he would wait till he saw me carrying a tray and the M.O. approaching, then he would draw near, crablike with sidelong caracolings and seize the corner of my apron in his pin-like teeth, and try to give the impression that I was encouraging him. The M.O. would say stiffly that that dog must not be allowed in the Compound. Whereupon that intelligent puppy would leave me and trot gaily up to one of the huts as if he was accustomed to spend all his days there. When spoken to sharply he would retreat under the bed and there remain grinning amiably from the furthest corner.

The pleasantest time I had in the Sick Sisters was the morning of the Great Rat-Hunt. We emptied the marquee of patients, for the rats

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were supposed to be under the flooring. By great good luck it was dry that day but for an occasional drift of hard snow pellets. The patients were taken, beds and all to the Sisters' Duty-Tent. A fatigue-party came down armed with sticks and accompanied by a minute little white terrier, called Lily, and took up their positions circling the marquee. It was a great function. Several of the M.O.'s appeared, Matron turned out to watch, and the hut-doors were wide open so that the other patients could see. Surreptitiously I armed myself with a stick, thinking that I might as well be ready too. Cautiously they raised the floor and three rats darted out, one to be seized by the neck by the alert and eager Lily, to the delight of her owner. The other two doubled back from the shouting, threatening figures. Then someone near said one was hidden in a suspicious-looking bulge of the canvas where it lay on the ground, and promptly touched it. The rat ran out again, and the discoverer tripped over the tent-rope as he tried to hit it. It was nearer me than anyone, running parallel. I could not resist the opportunity; for the minute I forgot about Matron, Medical Officers and etiquette, and gave chase, thought of the old days and shooting goals, and let fly to the encouraging shouts of "You've got him, Sister, you've got him!" from the

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watching detachment. I had; but it was only a disabling blow; if Lily had not darted in again to finish the job he might have escaped. I think I got more credit for my share in that than for all the solid hard work I had put in, washing dishes, doing out huts, and making beds.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRINGES OF THE WAR.

OCCASIONALLY one saw incongruous things in France. I remember one evening in the tram-car sitting next a stout elderly Indian cavalryman, a Pathan, I think he was, in Hodson's Horse; that name alone has a romantic sound, recalling the glamour and dare-devilry of India in the Mutiny days. He was black-bearded, turbaned, fiercely-mustached, but with kindly wrinkles round his protuberant, glistening eyes; he might have been Bluebeard settled down to a peaceful, studious domestic life. He was deeply engaged with a dictionary and a little notebook. Curiosity made me glance to see what he was studying. It was a set of French exercises, but the strange part of it was, the translations were in Hindustani or Persian; the picturesque, even lettering of the East was easily recognisable.

Another time sitting opposite me in the car was a worn, tired-looking sergeant of Engineers.

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That man looked, bitter, down, beaten. He seemed about fifty, and had evidently been trying to drown care, but ineffectually. Just at the bridge over the Seine we received an influx of young, fresh boys, obviously from a draft newly off the big transport lying at the quayside and camouflaged in black, horizon-blue and pea-soup colour in a way that would have raised a thrill of envy in the breast of a cubist. One of these boys particularly caught my attention: he was so young, so ingenuously curious, the way he fidgeted about in his seat, first looking out of one window and then another, the keenness of his interest in the French money and the French passers-by. He was rather a pretty boy, with a fair skin unroughened by exposure, and starry eyes that were opened wide to receive every impression. As yet he was full of the idea of really being *in* the Great Adventure. He was a curious contrast to that other who sat regarding him with befogged cynicism. Presently the little chap could contain himself in silence no longer, with a pretty eager deference he turned to the sergeant and asked where the Rest Camp for soldiers was. The sergeant looked at him grimly for a minute, then said slowly, "Rest Camp for soldiers! Is it the Cemetery you're asking for? It is the only Rest Camp I know for soldiers." Fortunately

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the little chap was too joyously excited to take it as anything but a joke; to me it seemed almost brutal in its pessimism; the boy might have cried in the words of the Old Testament "Whither shall we turn, for our brethren have discouraged our hearts?"

After the young soldier had left the car, the sister whom I was with, spoke to the man, and elicited the information that he had years of service behind him, he was time-expired and re-enlisted. His two sons had been killed in Gallipoli. His wife had died while he was in the trenches. Truly he had had reason enough for his depression.

Another curious little incident with a touch of pathos, which recurs to me, happened in the streets of the town. It was a beautiful, bright day, a day that made one realize why the French adopted horizon-blue for their uniform. The atmosphere was very clear. The houses and the spires rose into it, transparent blue shadows. The roadways and the pavements were white, with always that wash of blue shadow across them. The French soldiers moving about the streets in their horizon-blue uniforms toned in so well with those prismatic, pastel colours, that they were hardly visible. The dark-clothed civilians were etched sharply and definitely; little bands of German prisoners, with their long

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bayoneted escort, marched back to their labour-camps, some in gray with the number of their regiment in large coloured cloth figures on their backs, some in brilliant, almost luminous emerald-green. Always there was a never-ending stream of Tommies, the greeny-yellow of their khaki showing much more obviously against those white, blue-shadowed streets. I was waiting for a tram when suddenly a kindly North-country voice said in my ear, "What's the news in the Saltmarket to-day?" and I looked round to see a little, old business-man looking at me with a deprecating smile. "You don't mind me speaking, I hope? I saw you came from Glasgow too, and I had to." He then explained that he and his wife were over seeing their son, who was very ill in hospital, but was beginning to pull round. They had been sent for when there had been hæmorrhage. With the garrulousness that betrayed his loneliness, he told me that his wife was lying down at their hotel, and he could not go to the hospital till four, and he was just putting in time looking round. We talked for a little, and he told me of all they had seen of the town, and when they had come across. It was evidently a relief to meet a compatriot and pour out all his story. Poor, little, stout, business-man! With his anxious, commonplace face under the bowler-

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hat, an incongruous figure, somehow, for tragedy to have touched so nearly, voluble with relief at the escape of his son from the sweep of death's dusky wings.

Another incident occurs to me, that also gives a sidelight on the ever-present pathos of the war. It happened at a cinematograph show, to which sisters were invited. It was held in a great barn-like place with none of the etceteras, such as orchestra, and programmes, and attendants showing the people to their seats with torches, that one associates with such performances. There was a little gallery at the back, approached by a ladder-like outside stair. Another V.A.D. and I went there as it was the best place for seeing the pictures. The programme was long and dull, and gradually most of those surrounding us departed. As it was the first cinema we had seen since we left Blighty nothing would have induced us to leave. Presently a very young officer came and sat near us. He inquired if we felt a draught from the door, and was evidently very anxious to converse. Very soon the reason became clear. He was going up the line the next day. He was very young, and very confidential. He told us all his worries. He was twenty-three and the eldest of the family. His younger brother, of sixteen, was at school, and he had

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two little sisters at school also. Their parents were dead, and he had had to be very much the head of the house. He had done his best for them when he was home on leave, but he was worried, and seemed to feel very responsible for them. Poor boy! I think he had felt very young, very lonely, that night, and just wanted to talk with his own countrywomen. This going up the line, so quietly, so unostentatiously with a draft, clearing out early in the morning, with no woman he knew to say good-bye to him and wish him luck, was more than he could stand. He must speak to someone of the home things that interested him, so he pitched on us. I hope he has come through it all safely. We shall never know, for we did not know his name. But I hope so, for his own, and those little sisters' sakes, for he would be a good head of a house.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME PATIENTS AND OTHERS.

I THINK perhaps the most pleasing thing about nursing is, that the patients are so uniformly nice. Think of the heterogeneous mass of which the army is composed, drawn from every class and creed, and yet in that year in France I don't think I have had more than three or four patients that I have not liked, not that, even, they were actively disagreeable, just that they were unpleasing.

Even the British West Indians, whom nobody was particularly keen to nurse, had their good points. Some said it was an insult to white women to ask them to nurse niggers. But to most it seemed that at least we owed them that. They had come from the warmth and the sunshine to help in a quarrel that after all could hardly be called their own. How shrunk and gray with illness were their big, brown, juicy, faces. How they turned their distressed rolling black eyes upon one with all the pathos and

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dependence of a dog in them! How wistful was their appeal "Sistaire, I have need of thee!" I remember we had seven come in on Christmas Eve, with pneumonia, all were on the D.I. list and all got better.

We had one or two Portuguese in another ward, good-humoured, warmth-loving, but incorrigibly lazy. When they were convalescent and should have taken their turn of light duties with the others, they amiably avoided the idea. They spoke no English, and very little French, which rather hampered my efforts at reforming them. However, one day, driven to greater wrath when they did nothing and the others did so much, I poured out upon them the only flood of unself-conscious French of my life and convinced them that they must "travaillez aussi." Invincibly good-humoured and willing to please me, though explaining that such work was only for women, they started to do their bit of the floor. Fortunately it was midsummer and very drying weather, for their method was to drop the cloth into the pail, draw it out and, stooping slightly, waggle it about the floor till the pool had spread to the requisite size and then their "scrubbing" was done. They had learnt enough French to call out emphatically when their medicine came round "Saltz no bon." They were neat-handed however. In the ward

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was a wooden puzzle with black letters "Just back from B.E.F." which had to be got into position in so many moves. Two of them copied it exactly, made the little blocks of wood, all neatly fitting, and printed on them, "Just back from P.E.F." There was something rather quaint about it.

Then we had a Eurasian officer in, who was the most naively frank about his dislike of discomforts of anyone I have ever known. Too ill to sit up, the first morning I went to wash him, he assured me unabashed and in absolute seriousness, "Wash! Take off my jacket! I will take cold!! I am not one of those who like water!" Subsequently I could well believe it. But so much for the contrariety of human nature, when the time came that he might wash as much or as little as he liked himself he was quite aggrieved. He had once been up the line, and with his squadron waited two hours in readiness to charge. With the preciseness and indignation of a child, he explained it was not nice waiting to go in, and he would not go up again if he could possibly help it. He told us also with the same naive lack of shame of how his brother had gone out tiger-shooting, and had got such a fright when he saw the tiger that he dropped his gun from the machan, and, when all was over and the tiger departed, how he had

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to be taken home and was ill for two months with brain-fever. He spoke with surprised awe of how the British officers would go off after tiger without beaters or anything.

The most puzzling and nerve-wearing patient I ever had to deal with was another officer who was in at the same time. Was there any means of making me uncomfortable, of thwarting me and making my work difficult, he seized it with delight. He took a positive pride in it. He boasted that he had been allowed out of hospital sooner than he should twice before, because he was such a disagreeable patient and the sisters couldn't stand him, and he expected to do so again. The mental strain of keeping one's temper and yet preventing oneself from being bowled out with flippant repartee was trying. On the other hand it was obvious that his nerves were all to fiddle-strings; before coming to France he had been in Gallipoli, from the landing of the Lancashire Fusiliers. His desire to get chucked out of hospital was to get up the line again. In his more reasonable moments he said he liked the freedom, the adventure of active service; he had scope for his superfluous energies. And lastly one had to condone much because of his wounds, though I daresay he would have violently resented such a reason for tolerance had he known of it. Before the war

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he was a musician, a pianist. He had lost two fingers of one hand, the other wrist was scarred and permanently weakened by another wound. So the knowledge of how little was left to him of his profession if he were permanently retired from the army must often have come to embitter and madden him into sneering, fleeing ways.

Then there was little "Ginger," a white-faced red-haired boy of nineteen who had been out for three months two years ago and had been sent home when his age was discovered. He held a marksman's certificate. Childlike he veered from exuberant spirits, when he would cart-wheel all down the ward, to blank depression. Sometimes when the older convalescent patients were sitting round the big pot-stove in the middle of the ward, perhaps toasting their bread for tea at its bulging red-hot sides, and talking, arguing as to how the war was going, how such and such a thing had happened, why the Germans had been able to advance, Ginger would steal away to his bed in the furthest corner of the ward and lie down, looking just a miserable wee laddie. "If only they would not talk about the war. I don't mind being a soldier, I don't mind fighting, if only they would not talk about it always," was his wail.

CHAPTER X.

YELLOW BROOM.

I WISH to try to reproduce the picture of one patient who is etched very clearly on my memory. He was in in May. It was a month of brilliant sunshine. The big marquees were all golden with it. The sides were rolled back so that the beds were practically in the open air. Only the sunlit tent-ropes crossed the shadow cast by the roof. The hospital-blues of the convalescent patients made vivid spots of colour, as they bent interestedly over the regimental badge they were making for a decoration, using red blaes and broken bottles for colouring. It was a craze in this compound at that time, till the M.O. suddenly awoke to the fact that every plot was being covered with regimental badges, and had most of them removed and forbade any more being made. The sanded paths between the lines looked bright, and the white-washed stones with which the orderlies had outlined them, gleamed shadow-

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lessly. Two of the detachment, gardeners in civil life, were bedding out plants in the compound garden.

Beyond the high, barbed-wire fence that marked the hospital boundary, the cider-apple orchard was in full bloom, line on line of trees dropping their petals in "the long swathes of daisied orchard grass." The leaves of some of the trees were completely hidden in the sun-whitened, fruity-scented blossom: others were dawn-pink where the cool, small buds were delicately, crisply closed. The very air was warm that eddied and drifted from the straight-stemmed fir-forest. Away beyond the orchard and the beeches of a "glad light green" that bound it, in the blue-hazed distance, rose the high ground beyond the valley of the Seine. The sunlight whitened the chateaux and the little town, whose spires showed so light and tiny against the blue May sky.

At the end of the marquee, that next the orchard, one bed had been carried right outside; the white sheet, the scarlet army-blanket, and the pale blue Japanese umbrella made a wonderful bit of colouring. A great jar of broom, like clusters of fluttering gilded butterflies, stood on the locker beside the bed. Just the broom we get at home in June. It had been placed there because the patient liked it so.

YELLOW BROOM.

It had ceased to make him home-sick. He could lie and look at it, and dream it all anew. He could see again the milky, blue water of the loch, the high hills, rising dim and hazy into the pale blue sky. He could smell again the refreshing, aromatic scent of the new bog-myrtle, freshly, lushly leaved. He could hear the countless larks spinning their thin threads of melody, and from the green young wood, the elusive double note of the cuckoo, infinitely mocking, infinitely musical. He could see again the small, uneven hayfields, with the big white gowans starring the soft mauve of the swaying grasses; and their boundaries of yellow, yellow broom. It was all there before him again, as he watched the blue sky edge this French broom they had put beside him. At one time the thought of it, the sight of it would have shaken him with a restless, passionate, sick-longing, for the ways, the places he had known; for the slow, soft speech, the fresh faces, familiar scents, the very mournful calling of the sea-gulls, on the wet kelp, in the early morning, when the tide was out and the cold dawn-mists lay and sagged among the hills. But now he was too weak, too weary to care—the yellow broom seemed to have wiped out all that was unsightly, all that was tragic in what he had been through, wiped it out as though it had never

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been. The alien sounds that surrounded him even then, the quivering vibration of the distant guns he failed to hear, the peculiarly insistent whistle of the French trains did not reach him, the quick dull rattle of the machine-guns on the Bull Ring touched him not. He was living in the past.

The letters from home, with the little pieces of home news, how "John was always at Bedford," that "Maggie was going on seven and a lump of a girl now," that "John MacCallum had put the high field in corn this year, and was that worried with Achnashee's sheep coming through," were the things that mattered. He never noticed much when we brought him the white feeder with the milk or whatever he was getting. It fretted him a little, a very little, for the only thing he really fancied was a bit of suet dumpling such as his mother used to make. I think he thought we did not understand when he asked, so he ceased to speak of it. It was better to lie, silent, dreaming in the sunlight with the broom, the yellow broom of home beside him. Poor boy! Poor Highland laddie! that the war had drawn from the quiet ways among the everlasting hills into its tumult, and had now left broken and dying at the very threshold of life.

It was not all tragedy, however, I remember

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there were two officers in at that time who in their own way gave us a good deal of amusement. There was the Navy man of the type that makes V.A.D.'s say they hate having officers, because it makes them feel like parlour-maids, always ringing and sending for something. But he, when convalescent, used to go for long walks in the forest, amply provided with thermos flasks and egg-sandwiches, and bring back such a lot of flowers. His interest in them was extraordinary, especially when one remembered most of his life must have been spent at sea. He used to pass his evenings arranging them, and tying up nice little bunches for the sisters, adding bluebells to mine because I came from Scotland! Which was wonderful, for we were generally in a state of armed neutrality. I thought him unnecessarily exigent, and I think he considered me sarcastic and grudging. However, when I ironed the white cover of his cap for his departure he was intensely grateful, and left thinking he had misjudged me. But I doubt it.

The second we called the "Cherub." He was an ingratiating little Indian Cadet of eighteen, who was left alone in the officers' ward after the others had departed. What wiles he would spread just to get someone to stay and talk to him, from Matron and the night-super

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downwards! What leading questions about her R.R.C. or the sister's waterproof cap! Anything did so long as the conversation could be prolonged. It was more like a small child delaying the inevitable putting-out of the light than anything else. And how we missed him when he went to Blighty!

CHAPTER XI.

SUMMER IN THE CAMP.

IN June and July almost every night there was lightning. All day the air was warm, sometimes so hot, so heavy, that it was like an actual weight pressing down on one. Though the tents were rolled back almost round and round, no air blew through them, no air stirred the hanging border of the roof. Towards evening when the shadows came, and they came more quickly than they do with us in Scotland, the air would stir a little, hardly grow cooler, but stir, and the scent of warm growing grass and foliage would drift about. Behind the belt of beech-trees, that still showed curiously light and silvery-green with the aftermath of light from the west, there would be a sudden, silent, white, illumination; the instantaneous quiver of sheet-lightning all over the north-eastern sky. The whole gave more the appearance of the trees suddenly going black and advancing upon you than of a light behind. These were almost dew-

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less nights, when wood or grass or flowers and folded clover-leaves remained dry and warm to the touch; nights when sleep proved fitful and elusive, when I lay sometimes and watched that sudden silhouetting of black trees against that silent shimmer of lightning, and listened to that eerie recurrent cry of a night-bird in the forest, like someone calling and calling, for help that never came.

These were the months that Madame at her little booth near the gate of the white chateau did a roaring trade in fruit. It was really a booth, for the glass only filled half the window, but when Madame left at night it could be shuttered and the door locked. At the back were rows of shelves, on which, high up, she had bottles of lemon-squash and raspberry and black-currant-wine. On a lower shelf she had French chocolate, plain and "noisette," and indigestible pralines. Lowest of all she kept eggs and fruit, beautiful country-eggs at fifty centimes each, and cherries. Oh! Those cherries of La Normandie! so big and black and warm from hanging on the trees in the sun, cherries from which the stones just slipped! Madame also kept excellent large flat sponge-cakes at four francs each; and in one corner of the booth there stood a stove on which she made omelettes for the Tommies from the Base-dépôts across the

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way. They used to sit on the railing of the bridge across the now grass-and-flower-filled moat that surrounded the chateau, and converse with her in rapid and effective, though English-sounding, French. Occasionally if she was very pushed one of them would assist her with her sales. The methods were primitive and she never rose to paper bags; if you forgot a basket, your cherries or your strawberries were handed to you in a half-sheet of the "Echo de Paris" or the "Rouen Journal." Eggs or apricots had to be stowed away in apron or jersey-pockets. How often have we wandered along that road, under the beech-trees on the grassy path, past the Y.M.C.A. Hostel for patients' relatives and enviously seen the "Christians" as we irreverently called them, playing tennis on their fine ash-courts! How often seen the Indian Cavalry ride by! Or long strings of mules, one man to six mules, would go past; the latter always provided a good deal of excitement, for almost always one ingenious animal managed to tangle the rein stringing each set together, or one would escape and with a joyous kicking of heels make off down the road with trailing harness, disorganizing and unsettling the others as it went. Perhaps it would be a long troop of soldiers who would pass us, returning from the Bull Ring. How hot, how sunburnt, how sticky they

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used to look! But how gloriously cheery they usually were; here and there one would look tired and overdone and weary with the full pack: generally however they would be singing or in high enough spirits not to lose the opportunity of calling out some gay if embarrassing greeting.

I remember one wonderful evening we had at that time. It was about nine o'clock and all the day-staff were off duty. One of the sisters had had her gramophone brought over from her ward. She had some beautiful records, such things as Handel's "Largo," not the usual hospital round, "Who were you with to-night?" "Keep the kettle boiling, Mary" or "The old ham-bone." She had it playing in her Armstrong hut, of which the canvas side was set wide open. We had quite a little colony of Armstrong huts there, each with its name printed up on a board at the door, "The Gunyah" "Blighty Villa" "Te whare" "Whitehall," whatsoever had seemed good and recalled distant homes or pleasant times in the past to their owners. Gradually we all gathered round that gramophone, canvas chairs, rugs and cushions were brought out to the sweet warmth of the long summer-grass. Most of us came in dressing-gowns and plaited hair, as we had been ready for bed when the music started. Those

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returning from the baths joined us towel and sponge-bag in hand. One of the V.A.D.'s made coffee and handed it round, commandeering all the cups in the neighbourhood: Blighty sweets were produced and then cherries. The impromptu gathering gradually assumed the dimensions and the trimmings of a real party. It was so quaint, so unusual, those uninvited "guests, star-scattered on the grass," the ever-deepening, scented dusk, the silent, sudden lightning, the loud, insistent, chirping whirr of crickets coming from every quarter of the compass, the "lights out" bugle-call sounding with just the fraction of a difference between each camp in all that great wide area, while through everything came the faint quivering vibration of the guns.

Now I look back on it, that evening was the end of one period of hospital-life. The weather broke in the night with a wild thunderstorm and the drumming rush of sudden, heavy, rain on motionless, leafy, trees, on thick lush grass and dusty roads. The next day the movement orders of several of the sisters came through, they departed for Casualty Clearing Stations and the Base knew them no more.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FOREST.

No description of our hospital could possibly be complete without a chapter on the forest, that forest which began just over the barbed wire-fence of our boundary, and stretched for thirty miles southward, so they said. It was a forest of firs, rank on rank of tall, straight, pinkish stems and dusky heads, the branches of the nearer ranks barring the sky as level clouds so often bar the sunset. In the frosty winter weather how still the forest was! Pale unwarmed sunshine filtered through and lit the greening moss. If a twig cracked under foot, it sounded like a pistol-shot. The cawing of crows dropped raucously through the silence, no other birds made a sound. When one came to a clearing and looked across the pale gold of the withered grass and dusky tussocks of heather, the distant ranks of trees showed, transparently, prismatically blue with the depth of the shadow.

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I have seen those forest-ways in December, when we went for Christmas decorations, with the snow lying deep underneath the trees, smoothly undulating. Here and there the dark, thorny, thickets of bramble, and the thin brown bracken-stems showed half-submerged through the high-piled drifts, perhaps one bramble-trail with a withered leaf shivered under its blurred outline of snow. Irresponsible blobs of snow stuck here and there to the stems of the fir-trees and fat cushions of snow lay on the branches overhead. If a wind stirred it sent the snow powdering down upon us, sparkling and glittering in the sunlight. If the forest was silent when the frost held, when the snow came it was almost a palpable thing. One curious, beautiful, laughable day we had. There had been a rumour in the hospital that patients were to be allowed to go into the forest with the sisters to gather decorations. We had no patients at the time who could go. Two of our orderlies offered to dress up and come with us.

What a struggle those boys had to get the hospital blues over everything! What stout, rosy, impatientlike patients they made when ready! Then we marched boldly through the hospital, passed the C.O.'s office, past Matron's office, recapturing something of that unreasoning, delightful thrill of childhood's fear when one

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has trespassed into private grounds. We were unchallenged, though for one wild moment we thought our fraud had been detected when the Quarter-master's glance returned a second time to our "patients," but the moment passed. We walked long and far through those white silent aisles, with the snow sometimes higher than our gum-boots, and yet it was not cold, although we had only our jerseys on over our indoor uniform. The sun had swung low and sent long blue shadows across the snow when we turned to come home with our booty.' I remember we came out on one of these forest-roads where there was better going. At first I could not understand what was chinking and chiming against my ankles, then discovered that the edge of my wrapper at the back was fringed with little icicles, as though I sported a sewed trimming-border of doubtful cleanliness. It had been a gorgeous walk and our "patients" though almost apoplectic with their double suits were none the worse.

The forest was wonderful about October when the bracken was turning from green to brown, to red like rust, to primrose yellow, to pale gold; when the mauve heather-flowers withered to warmest russet, when thistles, ragweed and St. John's wort sent adrift their myriad parachutes. In the early mornings the sky and all

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the distances were faint and dim like opals, colour changed and gleamed then clouded. All the cobwebs on the heather, with the weight of dew, sagged and shone like jewelled hammocks for the "little people." Drifting filaments caught one as one walked. The big accurate spiders' webs spread their round nets harmlessly between the firs, betrayed by the glittering dew. But as the day advanced and the heat strengthened the dew evaporated, and woe betide the unwary wanderer who walked, all unconsciously, into the swinging net, tore it to bits and caught the fat, cold spider, that had been sitting snugly in the centre waiting for smaller game, full in the face.

There was a human side to the forest too. In summer it was positively dangerous to make personal remarks there, for one never knew behind what clump of trees, what thicket of overtopping bracken the object of them might be lying on a ground-sheet, sewing or reading. Then khaki too was almost invisible in the cross-lights, and the golden, greeny brown of everything. It was not altogether surprising, considering the nearness of the hospitals and the infantry Base-dépôts that the fluttering white caps, the red and gray of the nursing-service should be seen often in those long forest-ways along with khaki. I remember once picnicking

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in the forest when the usual silence was broken by uncouth cries and singing, and three villainous-looking Turcos approached, in scarlet fezes, zouaves and baggy trousers, like figures out of some Ali Baba tale, quaint and incongruous under those quiet, shadowy trees. They came probably from a munition-work near the Seine where all nationalities seemed to congregate, Algerians, Japs, Chinese, and Niggers, of the lowest types of their countries, veritably the scum of the earth. However, these three seemed in the best of humours, white teeth showed in wide grins on their bold, bad, brown faces as they circled round us offering something, in unintelligible gibberish. They produced from within their none too clean, baggy shirts, apples which they insisted on presenting to us. One of the officers with us gave them some cigarettes each and they departed in great spirits, chanting and singing. I was glad I had not encountered them when alone. We did not eat those apples.

Always there would be French peasants somewhere about, gathering sticks or cutting bracken. Always we met hand-carts with huge, tottering piles of thin sticks roped on to them, a dog running tied underneath. Perhaps two or three little French boys, clad in long, black, sateen overalls propelled it almost unseen from

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behind. They were sometimes accompanied by a mother, a smiling, capable-looking young woman; sometimes by a grandmother with thrift and worldly wisdom in every line and wrinkle of her shrewd old face. In May the children would often come running up to us, offering bunches of wild lily-of-the-valley, doubtless the reason why we so often found patches of leaves but few flowers. However they were very ingratiating little things, and would say, with an alluring smile, what was almost a formula, "Souvenir. One penny. Good-night!" At that time, too, in the forest there were sweet violets, purple and white, and thousands of wood-anemones. Always the forest was beautiful. Almost all our off-duty time was spent there. Almost always there was that wonderful, brooding silence, save for the vibration and the faint, dull booming of artillery, which always seemed louder there, whether from the absence of workaday noises or because the trees and roots caught and held the sound—that sad, sinister reminder of why we were in France.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHRISTMAS IN HOSPITAL.

CHRISTMAS in hospital! The most important thing the words recall is "tissue-paper," I think it would be almost impossible to hold it at all if tissue-paper was not procurable. What rivalry there was in ward decoration! What vain efforts at concealment when one was sure to run into the chief rival in the paper-shop, and possibly discover that she also wished your colour. The men got so interested in it too, but if they were interested we just had to make up our minds to let the cherished colour-schemes go. I know of one ward, where after much consultation and discussion, the sister and her V.A.D.'s had decided on the entire scheme being purple and white clematis. Alas for Art! The Red Cross had kindly sent to the hospital some cheery pink and yellow and blue tissue-paper, and some green paper-bells, fluted and horrible. Some had automatically reached the ward. Imagine the silent horror of the designers when

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they found the cherished colour-scheme intersected by red and yellow intricately designed ropes and tinselly mottoes in royal blue and red with somewhat crooked but affectionate seasonable greetings. And they had not only to see it, but perforce give the eagerly-awaited-for and expected praise. Art went west in that ward, but the boys did have a good time. In another where the almond-blossom scheme of the sister had not been interfered with, and where pink lanterns alone reigned supreme and shed their soft light on the newly-kutched walls and the red army-blankets, the boys looked rather dull. There was plenty to eat; a charming table, with rich cakes, jellies and decorated trifles, groaned in the middle, but somehow it was obvious they were being entertained, they had not had a personal share in the entertaining. The sister and her V.A.D. stood about immaculate, talking to their own visitors. It was a relief to go back to that cheery, noisy, ugly ward; where they were all playing some silly card-game round the stove, and if you wished to see the sister, well, just go up and join in and be welcome.

In another ward, where the sister was Irish, pandemonium reigned supreme. Most of her patients were convalescent. The ward had been left almost entirely in their hands but for hundreds of black butterflies, which "Kitty

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Cavanagh " had added as her own touch. They were bold, bad boys and strangers were well-advised to beat a hasty retreat, for, unforbidden, they had hung bunches of mistletoe in every conceivable corner. The full, thoughtless devilry of this can only be realized when you know the ward was diphtheria.

In another compound, where the number of small huts made decoration difficult, they had decided to have a Christmas-tree in the village-square, as they called it. So there it stood, waving tinsel, and glittering balls, through the thin drizzle that graced that Christmas-day. There had been many little parcels there in the morning, but the Medical Officer's present alone found temporary hermitage among its branches, just a squeaking white woolly rabbit for " feyther " as they called him there. That compound was rich in nicknames. There was " Tou tou," " Hindenburg," " Hail-smiling-morn " and " The ray of sunshine."

It was in the Sisters' Bunk there that I had tea, and such a tea! beginning with lemonade and ending, through the whole gamut of sandwiches, cake, trifle, jellies, raisins, sweets, with tea. The bunk was, roughly speaking, about six feet by six; and into it, only partially overflowing into the village-street, were crowded, two sisters, three V.A.D.'s, two M.O.'s and the

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Padre, not to speak of a brightly-burning stove and all the ordinary bunk-furniture.

Later I strolled on to another ward, where a shadowgraph entertainment was in preparation. While we waited to view it, once more a sumptuous tea was provided and once more I was expected to partake. They told me there of how the patients had asked their M.O. to design the ward-motto. After weeks of brain-racking efforts after brilliance, the childlike simplicity of "Bless our P.U.O.s" in tow, picked out on a red ground, was decided upon. In his temporary absence on a search for gum to stick on the words, the patients deftly changed his letters from P.U.O.s to M.O. Rather nice of them, for they meant it! In that ward one of the patients and the night-orderly kept up a sort of continuous harlequinade, the patient made an excellent, if somewhat deep-voiced and handless V.A.D. The night-orderly, who at all times went by the name of "Little Tich," now blackened under the eyes, and in a suit of hospital-blues three times too big for him, made an extraordinarily funny patient, a cross between Martin Harvey and Charlie Chaplin.

The shadowgraph was entirely topical, representing a serious abdominal operation, and was thoroughly appreciated by this hospital audience. When bottles, corkscrews, struggling

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rabbits and guinea-pigs, borrowed from the "Lab" for the afternoon, were withdrawn from the patient's interior, their laughter was that of children at a magic lantern when the witty operator made the rat come out of the man's mouth and return thither tail first.

It was very pleasant thus going round the wards to exchange greetings, to praise and criticize. It was a delightfully novel sensation to sit down in the wards, yea, even upon the beds, under the very eye of Matron and know oneself immune from reproof. My Sister and I, alas! had no patients to pet and amuse. A week before Christmas our little lot went out on a convoy to Blighty, glad to go, for Blighty is always Blighty, but sad to miss Christmas in the hospital where they were known. They went off in the night with a convoy that was announced after we went off duty, but they left us rather a charming letter of good-bye, signed by them all, and addressed to "The Day Sisters." So though it was pleasant this ward-visiting, there were moments when we could have wept on each other's necks. Hospital in Christmas and no patients! When we heard the "Sister this" and the "Sister that" in the other wards, the little jokes, the silly topical presents, the good fellowship, all when we ourselves were guests and strangers wherever we went; with

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our own ward being busily swept and garnished we felt very much "Nobody-loves-me-go-out-into-the-garden-and-eat-wormsy."

That Christmas marked about the finish of the year and somehow it seemed to mark the finish of more than a year, it was the end of the good old days; within a month practically the whole staff had received their movement-orders and departed—the staff that had known the hospital as a camp one, all tents, through the vicissitudes of hutting, to the dignity of kitched and linoleum-floored wards. Perhaps an era of formality, impossible under canvas, has set in. I do not know. The Staff I knew had been scattered to the four winds, and "from the garden and the wild a fresh association blows."

CHAPTER XIV.

“WINNING” THINGS.

THIS was one of the mysterious hospital phrases much in vogue among the orderlies that intrigued me, and which I subsequently learnt meant obtaining by hook or crook or any other subterranean method. I remember when the word first came into prominence. We had just opened a ward that had been closed for two months; in fact, it had not been opened since the hospital had risen to the dignity of huts. While the hutting was in progress the contents of the kitchen and the Sisters' Duty Tent were stowed away for safe keeping (?) in another of the new, but still empty, huts. Then the day came when the ward must be opened. Sister and I went to open it. It was a gruesome sight. The floor was all muddy footmarks just as the German prisoners had left it after erection. The windows were all putty fingermarks. The bed frames were dusty; the pot stoves were rusty. Everything was as cheerless as it could

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well be that bleak January morning, and the patients were due in at two.

The orderlies got roaring fires on, and set to work to make the floor a little more like that of a habitable ward. Sister and I started to make the beds, not a straight task by any means, for we were liable to constant interruptions from the wardmaster, an elderly sergeant, whose manners earned for him the name of the "Duke." That morning, when it was the bare necessities we were struggling with, he was constantly coming to us on trifling errands. Later on the difficulty was to run him to earth.

Presently the ward was as habitable as it could be made in one day, and we turned our attention to the kitchen and the Sisters' bunk. The latter was in utter chaos. Two huge rolls of linoleum, destined for the floor of a ward, were propped against the wall near the stove to thaw. They were frozen stiff, and could not be unrolled, much less laid, till they softened. The asbestos covering the wood behind the stove still bore a rough but interesting plan, drawn by a German prisoner, of Europe, with the direction of the flow of the Kaiser's hordes to London. England and the Atlantic were marked "All Germany's." In another corner, lotion bottles and medicines, all grey with dust, were lying in a wooden case. The bottles, cracked with the frost, stood in the

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grimy wetness of the now melting lotions. However, a fatigue party had brought round our medicine and linen cupboards and table. so they were soon cleaned and stowed away. Some other ward had “won” our measure glasses; but our thermometers were intact. So the bunk was reduced to comparative, if comfortless, tidiness.

We turned our attention to the kitchen. The knives and forks were dark after two months' disuse, the enamel mugs and plates were grimy. The shelves were dusty, and littered with unusable flotsam from other wards—finished diet and indent books, hospital notices long since cancelled, lumps of putty, broken pieces of china that had been repudiated both at the Q.M.'s and the Red Cross stores. The point was how to get rid of them. While endeavouring to find our wardmaster, I discovered that the kitchen of another newly finished hut was similarly being used as a lumber room, so we bundled all our rubbish in there also, quite unobserved, and it gave us a little more room to work.

Two very important items were missing—a kettle and a Primus stove, both on our equipment list. We knew we would need both as soon as the patients were in. We were aware, also, of the vicious circle we would tread if we indented for one. The Q.M. would send back a

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message that broken goods were only exchanged on Monday morning before ten. We would reply that we had no broken kettle, but we wished a new one. He would send back, "If there was no broken kettle he could give no new one in exchange, and even if we had it was only on Mondays," &c. And so on, with the usual formulæ till we were desperate. If you can hold on long enough you get it; it is all a question of time, but sometimes the Q.M. holds on longest, and then he is very happy, for he has preserved his stores intact, and the weary Sister buys it at the "Nouvelles Galleries." While thinking gloomily of all indenting would bring in its train, one of the orderlies broke in brightly, "I'm afraid we will have to win one somehow." Our Sister gave him a free hand, and by four o'clock we possessed a kettle; true, it had no lid, but it sat comfortably on the roaring primus that had also been won.

We went off duty that night feeling we had done our best, but full of apologies to the Night Sister for the discomforts in which we left her. We need not have troubled. By morning she had added two campstools, a tablecloth, and flower glasses to the bunk; besides a cup and saucer and cruet for our officer patient, a teapot, a tin of Swiss milk, and not only our own measure glasses, but another as well. A nice blue

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enamel jug and can stood tidily beside our basin stand, both of which I remembered cleaning when in another ward. Yes, our Night Sister was a champion winner. Unfortunately, her reputation as such was known. Even three weeks after she left I had difficulty in preventing the Sister from the hut next door commandeering our own two precious white bedmats. She protested that our late Night Sister had won them from her ward during the much regretted absence of her night V.A.D. at supper. And even our equipment list failed to convince her.

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THE DISABLED.

And what of those who on war's altar laid
The glory of their manhood and their strength,
Who now creep back? Shall they be undismayed
By life, with all its emptiness and length?

Not thus and thus they planned it from afar,
For them a blaze of glory always flamed.
Others might drink the bitter dregs of war,
Not theirs the lagging anguish of the maimed.

Shall they look back, choked by a dumb regret
For what they did, or for their lost careers
And that which might have been? Shall we forget
All that they lose in the slow passing years?

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

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